

Council conclusions on the European Union priorities for the third meeting of the United Nations Environment Assembly

The Council adopted conclusions on the European Union priorities for the third meeting of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-3) (Nairobi, 4-6 December 2017):

"RECALLING that the United Nations Environment Assembly (the Assembly) of the United Nations Environment Programme is the world's highest-level decision-making body on the environment;

RECALLING that the United Nations Environment Programme is the leading global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda, promotes the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the United Nations (UN) system and serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment;

REAFFIRMING the commitment of the European Union (EU) and its Member States to the integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for development, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, chemicals and waste agreements and other environmental agreements; and NOTING that these multilateral commitments demonstrate the necessity and the capacity of all UN Member States to work in partnership to address global issues;

RECALLING the Council Conclusions "A sustainable European future: The EU response to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" of 20 June 2017 ^[1] as an important step towards achieving the SDGs in a balanced and integrated way;

EMPHASIZING the commitment of the EU and its Member States to work actively in cooperation with other UN Member States, the private sector, academia and civil society in spearheading knowledge transfer and solution-oriented action towards achieving a circular economy and inclusive sustainable growth;

RECOGNIZING that pollution is a pressing global challenge, often with transboundary impact and scientifically proven consequences far beyond the environment, including on human health and well-being and especially on vulnerable groups;

UNDERLINING that it has been estimated that 6.5 million people across the world die prematurely every year from exposure to outdoor and indoor air pollution ^[2]; 58% of the cases of diarrheal diseases are due to water pollution and lack of access to clean water and sanitation ^[3]; 2 billion people worldwide lack access to solid waste collection ^[4]; about 4.8-12.7 million metric tons of plastic waste is thought to have entered the ocean in 2010 ^[5] and 557 species among all groups of wildlife are affected by entanglement or ingestion of plastic debris in the sea ^[6]; and that the costs of chemical pollution (volatile organic compounds, lead, mercury) amount to 480 billion USD ^[7];

UNDERLINING the primacy of prevention and early action in addressing pollution; RECALLING in this respect the precautionary and the polluter-pays principles, and REAFFIRMING the need for their effective application;

STRESSING that pollution needs to be effectively addressed at global, regional, national and local levels, HIGHLIGHTING in this regard the need for a sound governance and TAKING a coherent and integrated approach;

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

1. WELCOMES the upcoming 3rd Session of the Assembly under the overarching theme "Towards a Pollution-Free Planet" with the aim of putting forward ambitious, effective and collaborative action towards preventing and reducing pollution, and APPRECIATES the work carried out by the United Nations Environment Programme to provide scientific information on pollution-related issues and to promote policy coherence, especially the substantial input from the Report of the Executive Director of the

2. EMPHASIZES the utmost importance of concerted and ambitious action and wide international mobilization to tackle pollution, taking into account the links with climate change, biodiversity loss and desertification, in order to prevent and substantially reduce adverse effects on human health and well-being, ecosystems and living species, since pollution in turn affects water and food security, economic development and social justice, including health equality;
3. REAFFIRMS the strong inter-linkages between environment and health and the importance to address them jointly; CALLS UPON the 3rd Session of the Assembly to decide upon concrete actions and measures to deal with specific issues that have adverse impacts on health and the environment, such as heavy metals, antimicrobial resistance, endocrine disruptors, and the growing use of hazardous pesticides and fertilizers; RECOGNIZES that biodiversity loss is a major health risk multiplier, also by aggravating environmental challenges; and UNDERLINES the benefits for health and well-being in protecting biodiversity and restoring degraded ecosystems;
4. EMPHASIZES the need for all UN Member States to monitor air quality status and trends, set ambitious air quality goals, and put in place policies and measures for relevant sectors; CALLS UPON all Member States of the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) to join and fully implement the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution and the revised Protocols to it, and promote cooperation of the Convention with similar regional fora globally; UNDERLINES the relevance of maximizing synergies between policies on air quality and policies on climate change mitigation, chemicals and waste management, biodiversity, health, transport, energy and agriculture; and STRESSES that the implementation of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change greatly contributes to tackling air pollution;
5. EMPHASIZES the importance of ensuring good quality of surface water and groundwater, the need to implement measures to improve regular monitoring and assessment of water quality and to prevent and reduce water pollution as far as possible through effective measures at source and by accelerating efforts to reduce the share of waste water released to the environment without any or insufficient treatment; STRESSES the particular importance of international cooperation on waters, and ENCOURAGES UN Member States to join and implement the UNECE Water Convention ^[8], its relevant Protocols, and the UN Watercourses Convention ^[9];
6. REAFFIRMS the commitment of the EU and its Member States to the “Our ocean, our future: call for action” Declaration adopted at the UN Ocean Conference ^[10], and WELCOMES the voluntary commitments to address marine pollution made at this conference; STRESSES the need to urgently address marine pollution of all kinds, particularly from land based activities according to the source-to-sea approach, including nutrient pollution, untreated wastewater and hazardous substances, and marine litter, with specific focus on plastics and micro-plastics, as well as noise pollution and acidification of the oceans; and CALLS UPON UN Member States to develop and adopt measures and incentives, including legislation, to phase-out micro-plastics from identified key sources, and reduce the production and promote the sustainable use of plastics and sharing of best practices globally;
7. UNDERLINES that the UN Member States and relevant UN organizations need to address the soil pollution and soil contamination both from diffuse and point sources and their wide ranging ramifications, such as secondary air pollution, impact on human health, agriculture and food security, biodiversity and ecosystems and nitrogen pollution; RECOGNIZES that there is a large knowledge gap on the extent of soil pollution and its impact on the environment and health; and INVITES the 3rd Session of the Assembly to address it;
8. EMPHASIZES the important role of sound management of chemicals and waste throughout their whole life cycle in ensuring the well-being of society, achieving relevant goals of the 2030 Agenda, as well as in transitioning to a circular economy, while bearing in mind that the growing global production, use and trade in chemicals is placing an increasing burden on all countries, especially on developing countries; HIGHLIGHTS also the possible role of sustainable chemistry and other approaches and solutions, such as safe non-chemical alternatives, as reflected in the Assembly Resolution 2/7 ^[11], in addressing these challenges; CALLS on UN Member States to increase knowledge of hazardous substances and information exchange on chemicals in products, and replace hazardous chemicals with safer alternatives; WELCOMES the entry into force of the Minamata Convention; and CALLS on all UN Member States to ratify the convention and work towards its effective implementation;
9. UNDERLINES the need to engage municipalities in programmes to prevent and reduce pollution in cities and assist in forging alliances to promote best practices, technological innovations and good governance, stressing its relevance to the implementation of SDG 11 of the 2030 Agenda; and CALLS FOR the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, which addresses inter alia air, water, marine, soil and noise pollution, the need for sustainable solid waste management as well as the sustainable use of land;
10. UNDERLINES that in order to achieve concrete results in terms of a global prevention and reduction in pollution, we must make fundamental changes in the way our societies produce and consume goods and services, including promoting sustainable

lifestyles, sustainable financing and circular economy through eco-innovation, sharing product sustainability information, reduce-reuse-recycle, ecosystem-based approaches, integrated life-cycle approaches, the development of new technologies and business models aiming at achieving a resource-efficient and low-carbon economy, and engage with the stakeholders in the exchange of best practices and expertise; URGES the 3rd Session of the Assembly to promote these approaches; and WELCOMES the intention of the International Resource Panel to contribute to the 3rd Session of the Assembly with the assessment of global resource use and the link between resource efficiency and pollution reduction;

11. LOOKS FORWARD TO the adoption by the 3rd Session of the Assembly of an ambitious, concise and action-oriented ministerial declaration, which expresses the political commitment of all UN Member States to effectively tackle pollution, including transboundary pollution;
12. UNDERLINES the need to further strengthen and enhance international and regional cooperation to successfully address pollution in an integrated way, promote cross-linkages and seek further synergies through relevant UN bodies, multilateral environmental agreements and international initiatives; and INVITES the 3rd Session of the Assembly to mandate the United Nations Environment Programme to set up an action programme for preventing and reducing pollution, building on existing mechanisms where appropriate;
13. WELCOMES the United Nations Environment Programme's initiative, in the context of the 3rd Session of the Assembly, to call for meaningful voluntary pledges and commitments to take action towards preventing and reducing pollution, as such commitments will constitute a crucial part of the 3rd Session of the Assembly outcomes and strengthen its action-oriented nature; WELCOMES the pledges and commitments already made; and CALLS UPON all UN Member States, relevant UN bodies, civil society, academia and private sector to demonstrate their global ambition and solution-oriented action;
14. CALLS upon the EU and its Member States to present, ahead of the 3rd Session of the Assembly, specific actions against pollution, in order to register relevant voluntary commitments in the context of the 3rd Session of the Assembly;
15. HIGHLIGHTS the importance of education, lifelong learning and raising public awareness of the environmental challenges in order to stress personal responsibility to prevent and reduce pollution through more sustainable lifestyles and consumption patterns; INVITES in this context the United Nations Environment Programme to provide guidance on product sustainability information; and EMPHASIZES the importance of communicating the outcomes of the 3rd Session of the Assembly to the broader public in an appealing and accessible manner, so that every person can understand the importance of preventing and reducing pollution and how this will benefit their health, welfare and living environment, thereby conveying the role of the United Nations Environment Programme and the Assembly in making a significant, positive difference to the planet and to people's everyday lives;
16. WELCOMES the standing invitation by the UN General Assembly to the President of the UN Environment Assembly to the session of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF); HIGHLIGHTS the contribution of the Assembly in providing policy guidance and defining policy responses to address emerging and persistent environmental challenges in the implementation of the SDGs; STRESSES that pollution prevention and reduction are necessary for delivering on the 2030 Agenda; and CALLS ON the 3rd Session of the Assembly to send clear political messages to the detailed review of SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12 and 15 at the HLPF in 2018."

[1] Doc. 10370/17.

[2] Report "Towards a Pollution-Free Planet" (2017), page III.

[3] Report "Towards a Pollution-Free Planet" (2017), page III.

[4] Report "Towards a Pollution-Free Planet" (2017), page III.

[5] J. R. Jambeck et al., *Plastic waste inputs from land into the ocean* (Science, 13 February 2015).

[6] Kühn, S., et al., Deleterious Effects of Litter on Marine Life, in Bergmann, M., et al., *Marine Anthropogenic Litter* (Springer, 2015).

[7] Report "Towards a Pollution-Free Planet" (2017), page II.

[8] Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, Helsinki, 1992.

[9] Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses, New York, 1997.

[10] Endorsed by UN General Assembly Resolution 71/312 on 6 July 2017.

[11] UNEA 2/7 “Sound management of chemicals and waste”.

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